Ex-CIA Chief to Testify About Withheld JFK Data

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Washington — House investigators want former CIA Director Richard Helms to explain why the agency withheld information from the Warren Commission's investigation of the murder of President John F. Kennedy.

Helms, who was director from 1966 to 1973, was testifying today before the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

Although John McCone was CIA director when the commission was conducting its probe in 1964, Helms was head of the agency's clandestine services and was heavily involved in its dealings with the commission.

The committee was expected to seek Helms' explanation for the agency decision to withhold information about:

— CIA plots to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, possibly with the help of the U.S. crime syndicate. Some conspiracy theorists have suggested Cubans were involved in Kennedy's murder as retaliation for the plots against Castro.

—A Russian defector, Yuri Nosenko, who contended he had been a high-ranking Soviet intelligence official with direct knowledge of Lee Harvey Oswald's activities during a three-year stay in Russia. The Warren Commission identified Oswald as Kennedy's killer and said he acted alone. The CIA believed Nosenko was a Soviet-planted spy at the time and thought he would offer no truthful information.

—Discussions within the CIA about attempting to use Oswald as a source of information about Russia after his return to the United States in 1962. Helms told the commission the agency "never contemplated" such an effort, but CIA documents dispute his sworn testimony.

Committee members raised questions about CIA and FBI dealings with the Warren Commission as they took testimony yesterday from its three surviving members — former President Gerald R. Ford, a House member when he served on the commission; former Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky), and John J. McCloy, a high-ranking official in several administrations.

The committee also questioned J. Lee Rankin, the commission's chief counsel, and former Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, who was deputy attorney general at the time.

All five said they believe the commission reached the right conclusion: that Oswald was the lone assassin. But they said the commission's investigation probably would have been much broader had the FBI and CIA shared all their information about the case.

Katzenbach said he found it especially curious that FBI officials knew about the CIA assassination schemes and chose not to tell the commission.

"I'm surprised that the FBI did not seize the opportunity to embarrass the CIA," he said.

Admitting some recently developed information had not been available to the commission, Ford maintained before a committee hearing that "I do not think our lack of information had any adverse impact on our conclusions."

"I categorically deny that the investigation into the assassination was deficient," he said. "I have seen no new evidence which would change my view."